GLOCALISM:

The Growing Importance of Local Space in the Global Environment

Katherine Harmsworth

December 2001

ISBN 1-895992-25-7

INTRODUCTION

> ***"It is true that the world is becoming more localized, with local communities acting as enclaves against or as junctures with outside forces...At the same time localities are products of powerful global events and trends that produce relationships between cities as far away as Toronto and Taipei and as near as Windsor and Detroit." (Garber, 1997:42)***

Globalization has a seemingly paradoxical impact on local space, and particularly on the local space occupied by major urban centers. At the same time that it orients individuals more and more to a transcendent global community and economy, globalization also enhances the importance of local communities. The simultaneous emphasis on the global and local space is not coincidental for the growing importance of locality is in many ways a response to globalization.

This complex and dynamic relationship between local communities and globalization is captured by the term glocalism, which in this discussion paper is explored within the context of major metropolitan centers in Canada.

Linkages among cities despite great geographic distance is an important aspect of globalization, and the fact that cities are maintaining and promoting these linkages serves as one indication of the penetration of globalization in Canada. As individuals participate in international economic flows, instantaneous global communication and increased global networks, they shrink the gap between the global and local spaces such that we now live in an era of 'localized globalism.'

For cities, the intensification of globalization translates into expanded networks of knowledge, culture, communications and economic transactions whereby individuals within the local city area are increasingly looking outwards to a global world. It also means, however, that cities–the gateways to the global environment–are assuming a higher profile in the day-to-day lives of individuals.

At first blush, the intensification of globalization and the increasing prominence of cities may seem at odds with one other. How is it possible that individuals are more than ever focusing outwards and adopting a global outlook while at the same time the importance of where they live is growing? And how is the growing importance of cities linked to the intensification of globalization? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to understand globalization and the growing importance of cities separately, and then explore the interconnections between the two.

Katherine Harmsworth received her BA (Honours) and MA degrees in Political Science from the University of Calgary. This paper was completed during an internship with the Canada West Foundation. Ms. Harmsworth is currently working as an intern with Giving New England, a Boston-based non-profit organization that identifies and promotes organized philanthropy.

GLOBALIZATION

The phenomenon of globalization is not new (Castells, 1991; Watson, 1998), although a series of economic and political crises in the late 1980s and early 1990s intensified the internationalization of the economy, specifically in capital and trade flows (Horsman and Marshall, 1994). The effects of economic integration were visible in successive crises, national recessions, high unemployment and widening inequalities on a global scale. Behind all of this lay the fact that national economies had become increasingly interconnected and interdependent.

What is unique about the recent growth of international trade is the phenomenon of an international economic system that works in virtual 'real' time: "The internationalization of the economy is only possible because of information technology (IT)...it would be impossible to manage flows of capital every second in real time without the kinds of information technology that exist" (Castells, 1991:12). The development of multiple communication networks serves to increase the degree and change the type of global interdependence. As the Economist (2000a) notes:

> IT is truly global. More and more knowledge can be stored as a string of zeros and ones and sent anywhere in the world at negligible cost. Information technology and globalization are intimately linked. By reducing the cost of communications, IT has helped to globalize production and capital markets. In turn, globalization spurs competition and hence innovation and speeds up the diffusion of new technology through trade and investment.

These technological developments allow for the growing internationalization of production, finance and trade across the globe.

Canadians are actively engaged in this high tech world. There are approximately 48 personal computers per 100 people in Canada, and over 40% of the Canadian population are Internet users (Economist, 2000b). A recent study of Canadian respondents showed that 37% of Canadians aged five and older use the Internet, 40% of Canadian homes have at least one person who uses the Internet, and at least 25% of Canadians have their own email address (Calgary Herald, 2000). Connections to the virtual world are being fostered by public policy as governments increase their spending in the global information technology market. Canada is spending nearly 8% of GDP on IT hardware, services and software, and telecommunications (Economist, 2000c).

Telecommunication developments facilitate a complex web of interrelationships and a greater degree of interconnectedness in a globalized world; they deepen and broaden the scope of globalization while allowing for the creation of new political spaces outside state-constructed

boundaries (Marden, 1997:41). The international mobilization of goods, services, capital people and information, combined with the creation of new political spaces, also brings globalization from the international to the local level.

Globalization is not only a macro-process that affects states and nations; it now affects individuals and the communities in which they live. Issues in one area of the world can affect individuals in far away lands; thus issues at the local level can have global ramifications, just as global developments can have local effects. The local and global thereby converge, and nowhere is this more apparent than in large urban centers.

IMPORTANCE OF CITIES

At the same time that the impact of globalization is accelerating, cities are playing an expanding role in the economic, social, political and cultural lives of individuals. This growing importance is particularly although not exclusively evident in Canada where it is closely linked to the demographic shift from the rural countryside to urban centres, political restructuring, and the increased interconnectedness of individuals across the globe.

- Over 55% of Canadians now live in urban centers exceeding 100,000 persons (Vander Ploeg et. al, 1999:iv). The shift from a rural to an urban society is especially pronounced in Western Canada where the rate of urbanization has outpaced rates of urbanization in other regions.

- A decade of political restructuring has increased the importance of cities and the local communities in which we live. With the devolution of powers and the off-loading of responsibilities in an era of financial constraints, municipalities are now faced with delivering more services. Issues once considered responsibilities of the provincial or federal government are now managed at the municipal level.

- Cities are the primary engines of the new economy. They determine regional population growth by attracting both international and interprovincial migration through cultural amenities and access to universities. They also provide the high-tech clusters so important to the new economy. In essence, cities act as "circuits of exchange, urban development corridors and regional economic zones" (Hutton, 1998:17).

Cities, moreover, are growing in importance in an era where individuals are looking outwards to a globalized world. Increased international trade, rapid developments in high-tech communications and a greater awareness of interconnectedness among people all result in a heightened awareness

of both the global and local communities. The intensification of globalization and the increased importance of cities is not coincidental, and the concept of glocalism helps explain the bridge between these two trends.

GLOCALISM

Globalization brings in its wake a reconceptualization of spaces, boundaries and territoriality, and highlights the permeability of national and international borders to external influences. The distinction between the domestic and the international, between the local and the global, therefore blurs. As McGrew (1992:3) writes:

> Politics within the confines of the nation-state, whether at the neighbourhood, local or national levels, cannot be insulated from powerful international forces and the ramifications of events in distant countries... politics can no longer be understood as a purely local or national social activity but must be conceived as a social activity with a global dimension.

The shrinking of the world reinforces the link between the local and the global. As engagement in a globalized world increases, so too does the importance of the local places where individuals live. In part, this is a reaction to a loss of control on the vast global stage. In the words of Castells (1991:18), "As the world system increases, people in their daily practices and interaction are increasingly local and not increasingly cosmopolitan. In part this is because if you cannot control the world then you could control your neighbourhood."

Identification with a local space in a globalized world provides individuals with "a comfortable place of familiar faces, where one's competence is undisputed and where one does not have to prove it to either oneself or others..." (Hannerz, 1990:248). In a more positive or less reactive sense, the local community becomes the staging ground for global expeditions: "The easy access of the whole world, with just a little time and money, gives new meaning to the need of a subjective center – a home, a community, a locale – from which to move and to which to return and rest" (Strassoldo, 1992:47).

The complexity and uncertainty of engaging in a globalized environment increases the importance of a local place where individuals can find consistency and where they can have some direct involvement in shaping the economic, political and social events in their community. Thus, as the processes of globalization deepen, intensify and strengthen, individuals will become more attached to the security and certainty of the local versus the uncertain and rapidly changing globalized world.

However, this does not mean that local and global orientations are alternatives. Rather, they are two faces of the same glocalism coin, joint products of globalization.

Courchene (1995:3) writes that glocalism reflects the fact "that economic power is being transferred upward, downward and outward from nation states," or from the national to the global and local level. The transfer of economic power to the local level is resulting in the formation of powerful subnational units such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Citizens within these urban centres will come to think more closely about their own communities, and will seek local political solutions and democratic accountability as the world economy moves towards greater international integration (Courchene and Telmer, 1998:272). At the same time, global participation will flow through local communities, particularly when those communities are large urban centres.

The glocalism concept suggests that local identities will become a priority for citizens as it is through local identities that they understand and relate to a global environment marked by uncertainty. Economic integration therefore enhances rather than diminishes the local community. As globalization intensifies, smaller units of political affiliation may be relied on to a greater degree to meet citizens expectations and channel citizen identities. Within the identity space of the nation state, smaller cultural containers will form (Paasi, 1998:7).

It is here, however, that the glocalism concept loses some of its focus, for these smaller units are not clearly defined. The local space may refer to "levels as diverse as the household, neighbourhood, municipality, city, sub-national region or even sub-global region" (Wiseman, 1998:47)[1]. (Not coincidentally, people often refer to their pub as "the local.") It is likely, however, that glocalism will have its greatest bite within the context of the large metropolitan centres that provide the principal linkages to the global environment.

Regardless of how the local is defined, the glocalism hypothesis provides a bridge between intensifying globalization, on the one hand, and the increased importance of cities, on the other. Although the geographical dimensions or boundaries of the local in "glocalism" are ambiguous, and are likely to remain so, the utility of the concept is not diminished. It is, in part, a psychological construct associated with feelings of identity, belonging and community, but one anchored in real political units that serve the economic, political and social needs of citizens. As globalization deepens, cities in Canada will serve as the nodes where the local and global intersect in an increasingly complex global network.

1. For empirical analyses of glocalism and the definition of the local as a region of communities see Harmsworth, 2001

CONCLUSIONS

The creation of new terms and concepts must always be approached with caution for there is more than enough jargon to go around. Glocalism, however, enriches our conceptual vocabulary in a number of important ways:

- First, it identifies an important linkage between two major economic, political and social trends: globalization and the expanding role of cities.

- Second, by identifying this linkage, the concept enables us to place urban developments within a global context.

- Third, glocalism points to a dynamic rather than coincidental relationship between cities and globalization; local communities are becoming more important *in the wake of globalization.*

- Fourth, the term directs us to understand globalization in part through an urban lens; cities are where the local and global intersect.

Glocalism therefore captures an important dynamic of the contemporary world, one that has particular relevance for major metropolitan centres in Canada.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Calgary Herald (2000). "Canada leads world in surfing by cable." May 13: A4.

Castells, Manuel (1991). The Informational City: A New Framework for Social Change. The City in the 1990s Series, Lecture 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Courchene, Thomas (1995). "Glocalization: The Regional/International Interface." Canadian Journal of Regional Science (XVIII:1 Spring).

Courchene, Thomas and Colin Telmer (1998). From Heartland to North American Region State. Monograph Series on Public Policy. Centre for Public Management, Faculty of Management. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

The Economist (2000a). "Elementary, my dear Watson." September 23: 8.

The Economist (2000b). "Falling through the Net?" September 23:34.

The Economist (2000c). "Catch up if you can." September 23: 32.

Garber, Judith (1997). "Frameworks for Inquiry: Local Government, Urban Politics, and Social Movements." The Politics of the City. Ed. Timothy L. Thomas. Toronto: ITP Nelson.

Hannerz, Ulf (1990). "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture." Theory, Culture and Society, Volume 7.

Harmsworth, Katherine (2001). "Global Flows and Local Spaces: Identity and Community in a Globalized World." MA Thesis. Calgary: University of Calgary.

Horsman, Matthew and Andrew Marshall (1994). After the Nation State: Citizens, Tribalism, and New World Disorder. London: Harper Collins.

Hutton, Thomas A. (1998). The Transformation of Canada's Pacific Metropolis: A Study of Vancouver. Ed. France St. Hilaire. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Marden, Peter (1997). "Geographies of Dissent: Globalization, Identity and the Nation." Political Geography , 16:1.

McGrew, Anthony G. (1992). "Conceptualizing Global Politics," in McGrew et al, Global Politics: Globalization and the Nation-State. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Paasi, Anssi (1998). "Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows." Geopolitics and International Boundaries, Volume 4.

Strassoldo, Raimondo (1992). "Globalism and Localism: Theoretical Reflections and Some Evidence," in Globalization and Territorial Identities. Ed. Zdravko Milnar. Hampshire: Avebury.

Vander Ploeg, Casey, Loleen Youngman Berdahl and Roger Gibbins (1999). Cities @ 2000: Canada's Urban Landscape. Calgary: Canada West Foundation.

Watson, William (1998). Globalization and the Meaning of Canadian Life. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Wiseman, J. (1998). Global Nations? Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Linking Policy to People

Since 1971, Canada West Foundation has provided citizens and policy makers with non-partisan, non-ideological research on a wide range of issues of critical importance to western Canadians. The continuation of our programs depends upon the support of individuals, corporations, and granting foundations. We encourage all who believe in our mission to become Friends of Canada West and thereby ensure that our initiatives continue to have maximum impact.

For more information or to become a Friend, please contact the Canada West Foundation by phone (403-264-9535) or e-mail (cwf@cwf.ca).

Canada West Foundation is a Registered Canadian Charitable Organization (#11882 8698 RR 0001).

The Benefits of Friendship...

Supporters
(Friends that contribute between $100 and $249) receive: a one year subscription to our newsletter and executive summaries of CWF reports.

Contributors
(Friends that contribute between $250 and $499) receive: a one year subscription to our newsletter and all regular CWF publications except special reports.

Associates
(Friends that contribute between $500 and $999) receive: a one year subscription to our newsletter and all regular CWF publications including special reports.

Patrons
(Friends that contribute between $1,000 and $4,999) receive: all benefits of the Associate level plus special briefing sessions with CWF Policy Analysts.

Benefactors
(Friends that contribute $5,000 or more) receive: all benefits of the Patron level plus invitations to exclusive Benefactor events and special recognition in the Annual Report.

Friends Also Receive:

- 10% discount on CWF events
- 30% discount on CWF special reports
- CWF Annual Report
- Official tax receipt

Subscriptions

Canada West Foundation is pleased to offer annual subscriptions for $200. Students can subscribe for a reduced rate of $35 (student identification is required). Seniors (65+) can subscribe for a reduced rate of $50. Subscribers receive the CWF newsletter, all regular CWF publications, executive summaries of all special reports, and a 20% discount on special reports.

CanadaWest FOUNDATION